Moral Injury and Moral Repair

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Why is Unique About Modern Military / Long Wars?

- Resilience resources: Pride, purposefulness, leadership, training, peer-support…
  - Roles are motivating and reinforcing
  - Societal support for warriors / military
- Combat and operational experiences are complex:
  - Deployment adversities, stressors, sacrifices take toll
  - Non-combat roles entail unprecedented exposure
  - Traumas are complex, repeated, and enduring
  - Loss is profound
  - Bearing witness to mass destruction, human depravity and evil
  - Destruction, killing, maiming
- Military trauma has been conceptualized narrowly

Current Conceptualization of PTSD

- Neo-Classical Conditioning Model
- Heuristic model has been useful
- Excellent evidence in non-veterans
- Evidence is weak for more complicated, interpersonal traumas
- Trials with veterans are weak
- Stress disorder and PTSD-thinking have hampered progress

Assumptions

- Resilience to fear-based traumatic stress
- Traumatic loss and moral injury cause the most lasting scars
- Loss and moral injury require different thinking
- Shame and guilt thwarts motivation
- Guilt, shame, sorrow, anguish are not extinguishable via repeated exposure
- *Reengagement, reattachment,* and *corrective action* are pivotal (not all intrapsychic)
- Societal, community, cultural, and family responses matters a great deal

Most Valid Open-Ended Definition

- *The lasting psychological, biological, spiritual, behavioral, and social impact of perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations*
- We do not know what “the syndrome” is
- We do not know its prevalence
- Betrayal has emerged as an important theme

Why Has It Taken So Long To Get Serious About Moral Injury?

- We have not asked the right questions
- Fear-based models of care
  - Shame and guilt not targeted in CBT
- Shame may prevent disclosure
- Clinicians may feel helpless or unprepared
- Clinicians may be too frightened of their own reactions
- Clinicians may be judgmental

Thank You